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Ed. Denison

A R E V I E W

OF

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

RESPECTING THE

ADMISSION OF DISSENTERS

TO THE

UNIVERSITIES.

BY THE

REV. EDWARD DENISON, M.A. •

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Things will have their first or second agitation : if they be not tossed upon
the arguments of counsel, they will be tossed upon the waves of fortune.

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A R E V I E W,

§c.

AMONG the various topics of political interest which have engaged the attention of the public during the past year, not one has excited stronger feelings, or has been argued with more acrimony, than that relating to the admission of Dissenters to the universities. No proposed innovation has, on the one hand, been viewed with more alarm by a large portion of the friends of our constitution in Church and State, nor, on the other, has any been more eagerly urged forward, both by those, whom we may fairly believe to be honest advocates of improvements in our existing institutions with a view to their preservation, and those, who now no longer conceal that their ultimate object, and not distant hope, is to destroy those institutions altogether.

It could hardly be expected that the discussion under these circumstances should not exhibit more heat than reason. Accordingly, on both sides

clamour has not been wanting ; unworthy motives have been freely ascribed : and while such terms as “ sectarian bigotry,” “ grasping monopoly,” “ selfishness,” and “ intolerance,” have been largely employed by one party, “ rancorous hostility to the church,” “ indifference to all religion,” “ scepticism,” and “ atheism,” have been as fully retorted by the other.

Now, though doubtless there may be some persons on both sides fairly amenable to such charges, I would willingly hope that the majority of the educated part of the community, with whom the decision of the points at issue must ultimately rest, are neither bigots on the one hand, nor enemies of all religion, or of our own established form of it, on the other. I am sure that among those who are opposed to this admission of Dissenters, there are very many men of liberal minds, moderate opinions, and calm and considerate judgment. I fully believe that among those who hold a different opinion, there are very many who are both sincere friends of religion, and true sons of the church. To myself it has appeared throughout, that an extreme want of information as to the point in question has been the most remarkable feature of the case : and that what there has been most room to lament is a want of due appreciation of the difficulties of the subject, arising from ignorance respecting it. Ignorance is commonly accompanied by violence. The fiercest partisans are always found among those

who are least acquainted with the merits of the case—while there are few subjects on which a charitable allowance for differences of opinion will not be the result of a calm consideration of the arguments on both sides.

The angry feelings excited by the events of the last session of parliament have now probably in some measure subsided. It may, therefore, be not altogether useless, during this brief calm, fairly to reconsider the subject, with a sincere desire to take a just view of the different bearings of the case. Should this attempt to discover some practical means of accommodation be unsuccessful, it may at all events be of service to point out the real difficulties, in the hope that others may be able to devise a satisfactory mode of removing them where I cannot do so myself.

With this purpose I will first state what is the claim advanced, and the grounds on which it is supported; and then consider what are the difficulties in the way of concession, and how those difficulties have been thought capable of being overcome.

The claim is simply this—“*Free admission to the national universities for all members of the nation; and a full participation in the education there given, and in the degrees which are the testimonials of proficiency, without the necessity for any declaration of religious opinions, or conformity to the religious observances of any particular sect.*”

I conceive this to be the real thing required ; for though the demand is not always put in so specific a form, and the bill which passed the House of Commons did not contain any very definite provisions for effecting this object ; still the real advocates of that bill always admitted that this was the ultimate point aimed at ; and the principle on which the demand is founded, plainly carries us to this extent.

Now the whole force of the argument involved in the above demand, plainly rests on the use of the word "*national*." Two points are assumed. 1st, That the universities are "national institutions." 2ndly, That into all national institutions all members of the nation have a right to claim admittance.

Perhaps in the sense in which these propositions are urged, both of them may fairly be disputed ; while others, apparently contradictory, may be advanced with an equal appearance of reason ; as for instance, that the universities being chartered bodies have a right to expect that their charters shall not be interfered with, unless they can be shown to have been transgressed ; — that the colleges, through which alone there is admission to the university, are not national bodies, and that there can be no right to interfere with their internal arrangements.

While the question is debated on these points of right, there seems little hope of arriving at any agreement. Abstract questions of right, are, of all

subjects of dispute, the most hopeless to adjust ; and when they are adjusted, you are frequently as far removed from any practical result as you were before.

Let it, for the sake of argument, be conceded on the one hand, that the universities are national institutions. Is it therefore a necessary consequence that all members of the nation have a right to be admitted into them? Surely not. All that seems fairly to follow from an institution being "*national*," is that it should be so conducted as best to promote the national welfare ; and it is quite possible that this may be more effectually done with restrictions than without them. If indeed we admit that it would be for the good of the nation that the restrictions should be removed, I allow that from these premises the desired conclusion would result. But this point of national good is the very question to be settled in detail before any consequence can be drawn from the sweeping generality of the assertion about "*national institutions*," even if that assertion be admitted to be just.

Again, on the other hand, let it be allowed that the universities are not national institutions in the sense in which the advocates of the Dissenters assert that they are ; but that they stand on the same footing as all other corporate bodies, holding the privileges granted to them subject to the conditions of their charter, and regulating their internal affairs by

the powers intrusted to them for this purpose. Does it follow from this, that in no case and under no circumstances the legislature has a right to interfere in their concerns? Whatever others may do, I at least can maintain no such proposition. For all corporate bodies being, so to say, the creatures of civil society, and deriving their very existence from the will of the state, it seems to follow as a necessary consequence, that their privileges must be granted with a view to the good of the community; and that the supreme power of the state must retain in its own hands the right to interfere, in order that this object be not neglected or contravened. And if it be said that this is merely asserting in other words that all corporate bodies are national institutions, I will not in the above sense, and thus far refuse my assent to this proposition.

But let us leave these questions of abstract right to be bandied about in controversy by those who are disposed to do so, and, endeavouring to take a more practical view of the subject, let us consider how the national good may be best promoted by means of the universities, so far at least as the present question is concerned. And if, in order more effectually to promote this, any changes shall seem desirable, let us trust that just and unobjectionable means may be found of carrying them into effect.

I would begin by readily conceding the principle

that it is desirable that the benefit of all institutions should be extended to as large a number of persons as are capable of enjoying them ; and, as a consequence from this, that the admission of Dissenters to the universities is a thing to be desired, if it be compatible with the purposes of those institutions, and conducive to their own well-being, and therefore through them to the well-being of the state.

If, then, the object be thus in itself desirable, it will be asked, “ *What are the difficulties which prevent the step from being taken at once?*” To this I answer, that the difficulties are of two kinds : the one relating to the effect of such admission upon the course of education now carried on in this university ; the other, to the consequences of the privileges which would be bestowed by our degrees upon persons who neither were ever intended to exercise them, nor are capable of doing so with advantage.

In the parliamentary discussions the latter of these classes of objection has been most insisted on. The former is, in my judgment, incomparably the most important, and that which I believe to be most strongly felt in this place. I would wish it to be understood that except when special reference is made to the sister university, my observations are to be understood solely to relate to Oxford ; and the case of the two bodies so far differs, that it is necessary to keep this distinction in view.

Let us then see what is the nature of the education given in this university—how it is carried on—and how it would be affected by the admission of Dissenters.

It is surely enough to say, without going into details, that the character of the education given here is essentially religious ;—that our statutes require, and that our sense of duty constrains us to make instruction in the doctrines of our faith an integral part of our whole system. I am aware that this obligation was formerly but very imperfectly fulfilled; nor will I assert that it is even now discharged to its full extent. But during the last thirty years, there has been a progressive increase in the amount of attention paid to this subject ; the tone of feeling now prevailing in the university tends strongly to the further extension of the same principle ; and it seems no unreasonable expectation, that, not a bigoted nor fanatic, but a well-ordered, systematic, and serious endeavour to give instruction in the principles, and to enforce the motives of religion, will, at no distant day, be universal in this place. Sure I am, that it is very much to be desired that this should be the case ; nor will I conceal my own opinion that a heavy arrear of neglect remains to be discharged ; and that much of the laxity of opinion, and imperfect sense of religious obligation, which prevails in the upper classes of society in this

country is to be attributed to the former negligence of the universities in this respect. From the very great improvement that has taken place during the last few years, I am sanguine enough to anticipate the happiest effects. Nor has the system already been without its fruits; for I believe that the improvement in the moral character of the university has kept pace with the attention bestowed upon the subject of religion; and that, while the students as a body, in the present day, are more orderly and more moral than they were formerly, the improvement is most conspicuous where the proper religious character of education is most systematically kept in view.

Now, how would the admission of all classes of Dissenters to our colleges operate upon this system of instruction? It would clearly not only shut out the fair prospect of improvement which now exists, but would also make it impossible to maintain for the future the plan of education now carried on. It is not a mere case of a few formal lectures. It is not, as it is frequently represented to be, a mere case of attendance at chapel, though even this presents no inconsiderable difficulties; but it is a question of such religious training and instruction as may fix the principles and form the character. Would it, I ask, be possible, in the supposed case, to conduct this satisfactorily? We neither could force upon Roman Catholics, Socinians, or Quakers, (to say nothing of Jews, or

avowed infidels, to whom the argument equally applies,) instruction in the doctrines of religion as we hold them: nor could we teach religion as a bare abstraction, to be accommodated by each to the varying shades of his own belief: nor yet would it be fitting, or decent, or profitable to any, to have those of a different faith from ourselves living among us without religious instruction of any kind. Indeed it is impossible that conscientious Dissenters should desire this. They surely cannot either wish their sons to be without religious instruction, or to send them to be educated under the care of clergymen of our church: and such the general body of college tutors must necessarily be. Protestants do not wish to consign their children to the care of the Romish priests at Maynooth. Can sincere Roman Catholics, with their exclusive creed, desire to commit their sons to the proselytizing influence of ministers of the established church?*

* Since the above pages were written I have met with the following passage in a lately published letter of one of the most eminent Dissenters of the present day, Dr. Pye Smith, which fully bears out the view I have taken above. He is speaking of the admission of Dissenters to the universities, and is expressing his thanks to Dr. Lee, Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, for the part he had taken on the subject. He says, "My gratitude is not the less because I think that the most dubious and difficult of all the subjects referred to. Since my attention has been drawn to a more minute examination of the argument, my opinion

I do not mean to say that some persons are not excluded by the present system, who might be admitted to education in our colleges, not only without danger, but with great advantage. I neither think the society of all Dissenters dangerous in itself, nor the differences of opinion by which some

has undergone a change. The end I think right and desirable in itself. No man (I almost believe) feels more strongly than myself veneration and love to the two English universities, or surrenders his imagination to be more enraptured with their "distant spires and antique towers," and the associations of their history. But to attain that end I do not see that the means exist. The university apart from the colleges and halls is only an idea and a name; but as far as I understand the case, each of the colleges and halls in both universities is of the nature of a private trust, and is an investment for purposes which imply that the membership and the whole discipline lie in the episcopal church. I have heard of no scheme for surmounting the obstacles; nor can I imagine any which does not involve the committing injustice upon the fellows, the tutors, and the members of the house generally. Disappointing and mortifying as this is, I cannot relieve myself from it. That the supreme government in every nation has a right (*potestas*) to deal with trusts and establishments either by having permanent courts of equity, or by special enactment upon the case, I admit; but the exercise of this political or legal right can never take place in accordance with the principles of the universal moral law, (*quod jus et fas est*), unless a trust have become impracticable, or *contra bonos mores*, which cannot be said of any of your academical houses. Most sincerely should I rejoice, if the wisdom and goodness of his Majesty's government should be able to adjust the matter upon satisfactory grounds. This, I humbly think, could only take place in accordance with the university authorities."—*Letter to Rev. S. Lee, D.D. &c. &c.* by John Pye Smith, D.D. p. 76.

of them are separated from us, such as need be any bar to their being educated here. In fact, even under the present system, some classes of Dissenters, as for instance, members of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, are very commonly admitted. Nor is there any thing in our Articles to which they, or any other orthodox Presbyterian, need scruple to assent, unless they hold our mode of appointing ministers to be "superstitious and ungodly," and the ministers themselves to be "unlawfully appointed;" the contrary of which is all that our Article asserts. Nor, though I say this more doubtfully, am I aware of any reason why Independents, as such, should be unable to subscribe the Articles of our church, which, particularly as to all matters of church government, are most moderately and charitably drawn up. But, without specifying sects, I should gladly see admitted among us, all who, not differing from us in any essential points of doctrine, would consent to conform to our worship and discipline; meaning by the latter term to include our course of religious instruction. But neither for their sake nor for our own, does it seem to me possible to include in this number those who differ from us on fundamental doctrines.

I am aware that there is always an answer ready to this argument. It has been repeated over and over again, during the discussions in Parliament, and always with an air of triumph, as if it was at once conclusive of the point at issue. The answer

I mean is this. “*How, then, do they manage at Cambridge? At Cambridge they do that which you represent as impossible. They get over that difficulty, which you say is insuperable. With them Dissenters of all classes, though not admissible to degrees, are received for education. How is it that their course of education is not interfered with by this? Surely what they do without any evil consequences, you might do if you pleased.*”

The manner in which this argument is urged obliges me to do what I would much rather not do—to make some remarks upon the Cambridge system, as compared with our own, and show why it is, that that is possible there, which I hold to be quite out of the question with ourselves.

First, however, let me say, that I believe the fact, upon which this argument is founded to be much exaggerated; and that the number of Dissenters to be found at Cambridge, who differ widely from our church, is far from large, and that even these are not admitted in any distinct character as Dissenters, but are merely allowed to be present without distinction among the general body of the students. And no candid person will deny that the practical effect of the admission of a few persons on sufferance may be very different from that of large numbers as a matter of right. But as far as any Dissenters of the class we are now speaking of, do obtain admission at Cambridge, if it be true that their presence does not cause any

disturbance in the system of religious education, either by making special exemption necessary, or by shocking their pre-conceived opinions; this in my judgment can only arise from the defective nature of the system pursued. And indeed the manner in which religion is treated at that university partakes, as far as I have been able to learn, of that general character of difference which pervades all their system of education as compared with ours. It leaves much more to the free choice of the students themselves. It provides means of very effective assistance for those disposed to carry on any particular branch of study, but requires very little where such a disposition does not exist. The freedom of such a system is undoubtedly favourable to the full development of the highest order of intellect, while one, where less is left to the free choice of the student, may probably be better suited to the capacity and disposition of by far the largest part of those who form the mass of students at any place of education. As regards ordinary studies I have no wish to decide to which system the preference is to be given. But in the case of religious instruction there seems to be no room for doubt. If religion is to be regarded merely as one of the faculties—as a science to be pursued by those whose inclination leads them, or profession calls them to the study, then the Cambridge system may be good. But if we regard it as the great foundation of all sound education; as

that, on which the moral character is to be built; and which, as the only sure principle of conduct, is equally necessary to all, in that case surely any system which leaves religious instruction to be received, or not, at the will of the student himself, proceeds on false grounds. For theological students as good, or possibly better, instruction is provided there than here. The course of lectures given by Mr. Evans at Trinity, as stated in the paper published by him, would not be exceeded, probably not equalled, in any college in Oxford. But still a member of the same college, Mr. Thirlwall, speaking of the religious education given by the colleges to the students, says, “*that in fact they do at present, as such, either contribute nothing to that end, or something so insignificant as not to be worth the taking into account.*” And much as this statement has been attacked, there is, I believe, a great deal to be said in its defence; because, however full, orthodox, and explicit, the lectures may be, attendance on the part of the students is in a great measure optional. And assuredly, even were universal attendance enforced, excellent theological lectures, and a sound system of religious instruction, are very different things. In the latter something of a catechetical character—something of a personal and individual application, seems necessarily implied. And this is what is now carried on in most of the colleges in Oxford, under one or another form. And not only is it already extensively car-

ried on, but, as is very desirable, it is in the continual course of being more generally adopted, and more efficiently performed. I do not mean to assert that there are no colleges in Cambridge, in which instruction of the same kind is given. Whether this be the case or not, I do not know. But I am sure that, if there are such, to them Dissenters cannot be indiscriminately admitted, without being, on the one hand, driven to a hypocritical concealment of their opinions, or, on the other, interfering very injuriously with the general system of religious instruction.

As far then as it is true that Dissenters, differing on important points from the church, are received at Cambridge without interfering with the system of education, that system of education must, in my judgment, be deficient. And were I a member of that university, I should protest equally as at Oxford against the legalized admission of Dissenters of all classes into the colleges, as offering an insuperable barrier to the very desirable improvements which very many members of that university must be anxious to adopt, and towards which, of late years, some progress has been made. For, surely, if it be true that there is any college in Cambridge, of which it can be fairly said that it enforces no religious education “*worth the taking into account,*” the natural conclusion would be, that it was high time that a change should be made in this respect, whereas it seems

on the contrary to be argued, that the present acknowledged deficiency justifies a step which will make all future improvement impossible.

It was mainly on this ground of its interference with religious education that the attempt made in the last session of Parliament to force Dissenters into our colleges was, in this place, so unanimously opposed. The declaration, which was so extensively signed by members of convocation, was brought forward in consequence of Mr. Wood's bill; and its expressions must be construed with reference to that measure—a measure conceived apparently in entire ignorance of the whole nature and constitution of those establishments for which the honourable member proposed to legislate; and of which, though the intention was evident, and not denied, the manner of operation was neither easy to be collected from the bill itself; nor was it ever explained by the proposer, or any of the supporters of it.

But though a measure intended to have the effect of introducing Dissenters of all classes into our colleges, was favourably received by the House of Commons while its proposed effects were ill understood; now, that there has been a little more time for reflection, this can hardly again be the case. It will be seen that such a measure, should it be effectual, would in fact put an end to our whole system of religious education; a consequence which must surely be conclusive with the legislature against

entertaining any such plan. An attempt to put down religious education by law is not one which the christian legislature of this country can ever sanction.

But even should this view be generally taken, and such an attempt not be repeated, it will be said, perhaps, that the desired object may still be attained by other means, and that all classes of Dissenters may be admitted to the advantages of university education, without any interference with the existing colleges at all.

A proposition to this effect has lately been put forth by a writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, who unites considerable ability with an extensive acquaintance with the ancient constitution and state of universities both in this country and on the Continent—an advocate of a very different stamp from the ignorant and shallow declaimers who, both in and out of Parliament, have been calling out for the admission of Dissenters to the universities, without appearing to have the slightest notion either of the difficulties to be overcome, or of the effects such a measure would produce. It is but fair to this writer to say, that he states his views distinctly, and with great force; and if he does not succeed in mastering the difficulties in his way, it is apparently neither from want of knowledge of his subject, nor of ability to handle it. He makes, too, no use of the popular topics of misrepresentation, which are so much in vogue in both Houses of

Parliament. He neither attempts to divert the attention of his readers from the main question at issue, by ridiculing the custom of subscription to the Articles; nor dwells upon the favourite and oft-repeated sophistry of the right of interference with the colleges, on the ground of their endowments having been given by Roman Catholics, and therefore having been, as it is assumed, transferred at the Reformation to their present possessors by the state.

Instead of harping upon these paltry sophistries, he begins by making some admissions, in which nearly all the arguments of the supporters of Mr. Wood's bill are given up, and their views openly declared to be mischievous and absurd. He expressly disclaims all right or intention of interfering with the colleges—admits the incompatibility of the compulsory admission of Dissenters into them with the existing religious education, and religious observances, and fully allows the injustice and inexpediency of attempting to subvert that education and those observances, to facilitate the admission of Dissenters.

Having made these concessions—concessions entirely overthrowing all the arguments used by the advocates of the Dissenters in the last session of parliament, the reviewer proceeds to take up an entirely new ground, and to argue that the difficulty of the question arises solely from the departure that has taken place from the original constitution

of the university. The change of which he speaks is that by which the university at large has become merged in the colleges, which were originally but private establishments existing in it: and he therefore argues that the proper and easy remedy will be such a restoration of the ancient state of things, as shall allow Dissenters free admission into the university, without at all interfering with the statutes, the system of education, or discipline of any of the existing colleges.

Now, there is something at first sight very plausible in this view. The defects in the existing system of education pointed out by the reviewer, though highly coloured, are not without some foundation in truth. And the plan he proposes seems to hold out a prospect of improvement to the university at large, while it offers to Dissenters that access to an university education, which we would willingly open to them, could it be done without injury to ourselves. But the more we examine his proposition in detail, the more plainly shall we see the many obstacles and difficulties which there are in the way of its success—obstacles not arising, as the reviewer would imply, solely out of the prejudices or selfish feelings of the collegiate bodies, but necessarily out of the circumstances themselves; and the existence of which all must admit, though different persons may estimate differently their magnitude and force.

I will not indeed assert that they are such, that it is impossible they should be overcome. I regard

this as a much less certain impossibility than the amalgamation in our colleges of all sects, differing as sects at present do differ from each other. But I do not see that the reviewer has pointed out in detail how this may be done : or that he has shown any real security against such a plan leading to evils which he himself paints in the strongest colours, and enlarges upon with great force.

I have no intention of entering into any discussion upon the antiquarian part of the subject, having no such acquaintance with it as in any way entitles me to do so. I am willing to accept the historical statements of the reviewer as correct, as far as matters of fact are concerned, though in assigning causes and motives his judgment is probably somewhat warped by his prejudices.

Of course, no one who has the slightest acquaintance with the history of the universities, can doubt the general fact that they existed as seats of learning, resorted to by vast numbers of students, and, as chartered bodies enjoying peculiar privileges, long before the foundation of any of the existing colleges, or any other bodies of the same kind. Walter de Merton, the inventor of the collegiate system in the reign of Henry III. founded his college in Oxford because Oxford was then a place where learning flourished, and a chartered university, his object being to give peculiar facilities to a select body of students to pursue the studies already carried on in the place. With the same

view, Peter House was shortly afterwards founded at Cambridge. But certainly at that time, neither did Merton College in Oxford, nor Peter House in Cambridge, constitute the respective universities; but they were small and private bodies, existing in connexion with them.

But, it seems, that between the latter part of the thirteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, the colleges so increased in number and size, as gradually to absorb within their walls the whole floating body of students. The advantages which they offered of cheaper education, and more strict discipline, together with the prospect of admission to the benefits of their respective foundations, would naturally make the students resort to them in preference to the unendowed halls. And these in consequence rapidly sunk as the number of the colleges increased and their capacity was extended: so that when, subsequently to the reformation, the influx of students to the university was greatly diminished, the halls so nearly perished altogether, that instead of three hundred, which existed at the beginning of the fourteenth century, at the beginning of the seventeenth there was only the same number as at present.

But although the halls thus disappeared in open competition with the colleges between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the argument of the reviewer is, that in more modern times they would inevitably have revived, were there the same

facility now for their establishment as was the case in the ancient days of the university. The difference which exists in this respect, according to him, arises from the right of nomination of the principal of such halls having been usurped by the Earl of Leicester, when chancellor of the university in 1570, a right which had before been exercised by the students themselves; and this, though an usurpation on his part, was afterwards confirmed to his successors by an act of convocation.

Admitting this to be correct, let us consider how the system would probably act, were the same facilities for the foundation of halls in existence now, as formerly, and admission to the universities open to the Dissenters. The inevitable consequence surely would be, that the Dissenters would establish halls, or found colleges for themselves. The reviewer, indeed, says that this would not be the case. He says, "*We are confident, their disabilities being removed, and the means offered to the Dissenters of an university education without any forced religious compliances, that they would never think of establishing for themselves collegiate foundations of a sectarian character.*" But he states no ground for this confidence he expresses, and it is rather too much to ask us to take his "*ipse dixit*" as to the future conduct of all the various denominations of Dissenters, under circumstances in which they have not as yet been placed.

It seems, indeed, to be doing injustice to the sincerity of the dissenting body, and to their sense of the importance of religious education, to suppose that they would not be anxious to found establishments, in which they could educate the youth of their own communion in their peculiar tenets, and celebrate religious worship after their own form. For according to the plan which the Reviewer seems to suppose they would prefer to this, they would lodge in licensed boarding houses in common with members of the established church; and therefore, according to his own admission with reference to a similar state of things in colleges, it would be impossible for any system of religious instruction, or religious worship, to be there enforced. Were the supposed system of the reviewer to be realised, it would, I think, be a great evil; for it would go far to destroy the necessary connexion of religion with education, and would thus sanction a principle which, when carried on elsewhere, has been so strongly denounced. It would not, indeed, altogether amount to this, because the examination for the degree of B. A. would secure the acquisition of a certain portion of religious knowledge; but this is but a miserable substitute for that sound system of religious education which is carried on in a well-ordered college.

But can we suppose that religious Dissenters, having it in their power, instead of committing their sons to this careless discipline and irreligious

system, to establish colleges of their own, where they might train up their youthful students in severe and exact discipline—conduct their own domestic worship, and carry on their own course of religious instruction in concurrence with the general studies of the university, would not prefer doing so? It cannot but be that they would: and many persons will probably be disposed to say, “*why should they not?*” The answer is, that if religious indifference is likely to be the result of the other system, religious bigotry and fanaticism is the assured fruit of this. For what says the reviewer himself! He declares his opinion that such a measure “*would contribute to entail a continuance of that sectarian bigotry and intolerance, which, in this country, at present equally disgraces the established and dissenting divisions of our common faith. The exclusive system of the present colleges would be imitated, justified, exacerbated, and perpetuated: and in the old and new colleges together, the university would become little else than the nurseries, and camps, and battle fields of a ferocious and contemptible polemic.*” Now, though there is much in the tone and spirit of this passage which I cannot adopt, and though I believe that even the blindness of misguided zeal in matters of religion is better than the deadly stupor of indifference, still the evils resulting from such a warfare of “secta-

rian bigotry" can hardly be too highly rated, and because we have the happiness at present to be nearly free from them, we should be doubly careful how we admit them in future. And undoubtedly the state of things here supposed would divide the university into hostile camps. Bitter and endless controversy would poison the very fountain of charity and peace. The attention of the younger members of the university would necessarily and injuriously be engaged upon points of difficulty and doubt, instead of being directed to the simple and practical principles of faith. The breach between the Dissenters and the Church would be widened, and the dissension embittered. The religiously disposed of both parties would be in danger of being excited into fanaticism, while the thoughtless would be far more likely than at present to fall into scepticism, or a carelessness and contempt for all religion. This is the first evil, to which the system proposed by the reviewer seems almost necessarily to lead; and it is one against which, as he seems to admit, we can hardly be too much on our guard.

Till this point is made clear, till some plan is set forth in detail, by which we might reasonably expect the occurrence of these evils to be prevented, it may seem almost unnecessary to consider any of the further steps of the course. But still, in order to have a more full view of it, let us sup-

pose for a moment that means are found of security against this. And though I cannot clearly see any such, nor has the reviewer suggested them, some such means perhaps may be found. Let us suppose a system devised, by which Dissenters would be admitted to the university without interfering with the system of education at present carried on in the colleges, without introducing a latitudinarian system, in which religious differences would be merged by merging religion itself, and without giving occasion for that controversial spirit which the foundation of dissenting colleges would almost necessarily call forth. If this can be done, and though difficult to imagine, I will not assert that it is impossible, the difficulties hitherto spoken of would be removed, and the objections cease. And as these are in my mind the main objections, if these could be overcome, I should anticipate less difficulty with those that remain: though these too are not slight, and would require some very deliberate and impartial consideration.

In the supposed case, the presence of Dissenters is assumed to be harmless during the course of their education, and we pass on therefore to the next point of difficulty which arises, which is that of the examination for the degree of B. A.

Now, according to the reviewer, it is a peculiarity of our English universities that religious instruction is in them made a part of the course of education in the faculty of arts, "*that funda-*

mental faculty in which the individual is liberally educated to the general development of his various capacities." This religious instruction here required in the faculty of Arts, he very properly distinguishes from any theological instruction in the theological faculty given by the professors of theology. Such theological lectures form part of a distinct and professional study, with which none but those who are proceeding in the faculty of theology have any concern, and they therefore offer no impediment in the way of dissenting students in the faculty of Arts. It is from overlooking this distinction, and this peculiarity of our English universities, that it has been ignorantly supposed, that the whole difficulty about degrees arising out of the subject of religion could relate only to degrees in theology, and would therefore be removed by specially exempting that faculty, when the others were thrown open to the Dissenters.

On the contrary, the whole difficulty as to this part of the subject arises from that blending of religion with general education, and the consequent study of it in the faculty of Arts, which, according to the Reviewer, is peculiar to our English universities. Let it be admitted that this is the case. It may be true that no other universities have ever attempted to effect this; but it does not follow from this that it is not a thing in itself very desirable to be effected. It may be a peculiarity; but why

not a peculiar blessing, as well as a peculiar difficulty? We are not surely to be told that all peculiarities are vicious—that every thing which distinguishes our institutions from those of other nations is therefore to be laid aside. We have been in the habit, as yet, rather of seeing other countries aim at conforming to our model, than of accommodating our practice to theirs. We have other peculiarities in this country, which we have not been in the habit of considering less valuable, because not enjoyed by other nations. It has long been the peculiar boast of our country to have united freedom with monarchy—liberty and equal rights, with loyalty to our King. It is peculiar to this country to have purified our church from the superstitions, and freed it from the dominion of Rome; while we retain the blessing of a national, established, and episcopal church. And if then our free monarchy, and episcopal church, are peculiarities which we prize, so, too, perhaps our religious universities are peculiarities not lightly to be cast away. At all events this blending of religion with all education is a peculiarity with which we have no disposition to dispense. It has arisen from viewing religion, not merely as a professional science, but as a practical truth—not merely as one of the faculties, in which degrees are to be taken, but as the sound basis of moral conduct, as essential to the character, not merely of the divine, but of the scholar, the states-

man, the lawyer,—of the Christian in short, in whatever capacity he is placed. This view is so obviously just, that, though it places no slight impediment in the way of the reviewer's argument, he does not directly impugn it. He says, "*though contrary to all academical precedent, we have certainly no objection to the innovation.*" Admitting, therefore, that this peculiarity is to be retained, we have now only to consider it so far as it offers difficulties to our dissenting brethren at that stage of the academical career which we are now considering. And this it does, because as religion is made an essential part of the general education in the faculty of Arts, so an examination in religion is an essential part of the inquiry that is made into the proficiency of the student before he is admitted to his degree in that faculty. Supposing then, (and we must remember that this is as yet a mere supposition,) some satisfactory means to have been devised for the admission of the Dissenter up to this point, the difficulty here meets us in the form of the question, "*How is he to pass this examination in divinity?*" The reviewer, indeed, disposes of this difficulty very summarily. He says, "*the only change required will be, not to make the thirty-nine Articles a necessary subject of examination at Oxford.*" Specious words! but what do they mean? If they mean merely that a knowledge of the text of the thirty-nine Articles need not be required, of their historical meaning, of the

time when, and the circumstances under which they were framed, the change indeed might not appear very important; but the difficulty would not in any, the slightest degree be removed. But if it be meant that the doctrines of the thirty-nine Articles are not to be made the subject of examination, let us see for a moment to what this will extend.

Now the first five Articles relate to the object of our faith and worship, the ever-blessed Trinity. The three next are on the subject of the rule of faith, viz. the Holy Scriptures, and the three creeds as drawn from them. From the ninth to the eighteenth inclusive, they are occupied with the doctrines relating to Christians as individuals, the great doctrines of the sinfulness of man, and the grace of God. The remaining twenty-one relate to Christians as members of a religious society, including the sacraments and other points of difference between ourselves and the Church of Rome. If, then, by not examining in the thirty-nine Articles it be meant that the examination is neither to touch upon the relation of God to man, nor that of man to God; if the subjects of faith and duty are alike to be excluded; if neither the sinfulness of human nature, nor the justice and mercy of God; neither original sin, redemption, justification, sanctification, nor good works, are to be inquired into; if the nature and effect of the sacraments, the object and end of baptism and the supper of the Lord, are to be forbidden ground, the examination indeed need offer

little difficulty to any class of Dissenters, but will assuredly hardly be of much use to any, be they Dissenters or not. We might still indeed examine in the history of the kings of Israel, as well as that of the kings of Rome, and require a knowledge of the events of the life of Christ, as of those of Alexander and of Cæsar. But if this were all we retained, it would hardly be worth while to retain this; and if in this sense the thirty-nine Articles were not to be made the subject of examination, it would be as well not to profess to have any examination in divinity at all.

If, then, it were necessary after having contrived means for the admission of Dissenters thus to give up our examination in divinity, in order to enable them to take a degree, this would be a second difficulty, which I should regard as insuperable. But could the previous obstacles be got over, and Dissenters be brought satisfactorily up to this point, means might perhaps be found by which this difficulty might be surmounted.

In the first place, I myself believe that, even under the present statute, it might be possible for the examination to proceed as it does at present, regarding it as an inquiry into religious knowledge, and not into orthodoxy of belief. So that if the candidate for a degree showed himself fully acquainted with the doctrines of our church, and with the scriptures upon which those doctrines are founded, he need not even now be excluded from his de-

gree at this stage of the proceedings, on account of any erroneous tenets he may himself hold. And if this be so, the examination might possibly be conducted on the same system, even were Dissenters admitted. But though this sounds plausible in theory, I am afraid that in practice it would be found beset with difficulties, and replete with evils. How difficult it would prove to draw the line between opinions and knowledge—what endless cavillings and disputes would arise when any person was rejected in whose case it might be alleged that, while ignorance was the pretext, erroneous tenets were the cause—what phials of wrath would be by some parties poured out on the heads of examiners, who had been the just, but not unsuspected, instruments of disgrace to a dissenting student! And it must at all events be allowed, that to conduct examinations on this footing satisfactorily, would require a degree of judgment and temper on the part of the examiners beyond what it is fair to require from any body of men.

I mention this, therefore, not as a plan which I myself would adopt, but rather with the view of showing that I do not overlook it.

It might, perhaps, be more feasible, while we conducted the examinations precisely as at present for the members of our own church, to allow Dissenters, on producing properly authenticated certificates of their belonging to some other Christian denomination, to claim an exemption from examina-

tion on any points in respect to which that community of Christians differed from ourselves. Thus a baptist would not be examined on the subject of baptism ; nor an independent on points of church-government. But there would be much difficulty in this, and ample room for doubt, and dissatisfaction, and dissension.

The best plan (provided always that the previous system of education gave security for fitting religious instruction) would probably be to exempt Dissenters from the examination in divinity altogether, on their producing certificates from their private instructors of a due proficiency therein. In this way, while the principle of the connexion of religion with education was retained for all, and the efficient practice of it secured as far as regards the members of our own church, the jealousies and difficulties which the examination in divinity of the members of one communion by those of another must almost necessarily create, would be removed, and the Dissenter would proceed to his degree as freely, as far as the public examination is concerned, as if the above-mentioned peculiarity of our universities did not exist.

If, then, the difficulties of the course of education could be removed, those also which the examination presents might perhaps in this manner be overcome. But I must repeat, that, though in order to take a view of the whole subject, I have thus been considering these further difficulties, we have

not as yet in any way satisfactorily disposed of the preliminary one.

But, again, though the obstacles connected with the course of education and the examination for the degree of B. A. are those which I regard as most formidable; another class of difficulties has, as I stated in the outset, been generally more dwelt upon in the public discussions: I mean that relating to “*the consequences of the privileges bestowed by our degrees upon persons neither ever intended to exercise them, nor capable of doing so advantageously.*” And the consideration of these seems rightly to follow in this place, because, were all the previous difficulties removed, these, being connected with the degree of M. A., would still remain.

The privileges which belong to the degree of M. A. are of two kinds; the one, that of admission to the governing body of the universities; the other, that of capacity for various offices in the country at large, to which this condition has been attached by their founders. Let us speak of the latter of these first.

There are many situations, such, for instance, as the masterships of a very large part of the chartered and endowed schools throughout the country, for which some degree in one of the English universities, generally that of M. A., is required by the statutes as a necessary qualification. The greater part of these schools were founded after

the Reformation ; very many of them in the reigns of Edward VI. and Elizabeth ; and no inconsiderable number by those sovereigns themselves. It is needless to insist upon the object which the founders of these schools had in view in annexing such a condition to their foundations. No one can doubt that their intention was to secure in these situations persons, who, in connexion with an university education, had been brought up in the doctrines of Christianity as held by the Church of England. No one can doubt that if Edward VI., or Queen Elizabeth, in founding schools, had not felt that, by requiring the master to be a graduate in one of our universities, they obtained a perfect security against a Roman Catholic holding that situation, they would have adopted some other means for effecting the same end. It would surely be a grievous violation of the intention of these founders, if those institutions, which were meant by them to be the nurseries of sound religion, and of that pure Protestant faith, which the first of these sovereigns established, and the second zealously maintained, were to fall into the hands of Roman Catholics, Socinians, or any other of the dissenting sects.

The public attention has been of late much excited by a single instance, in which some charitable funds appear to have come into the possession of a class of religionists different from that for which they were originally designed. I mean the case

of "*Lady Hewley's Charity*." But if Dissenters of all denominations, by obtaining our degrees, were to become admissible also to these situations, this same grievous wrong would be done to the church, probably by wholesale: for the trustees of these foundations, with whom commonly the appointment of the master rests, are in many instances taken out of that class in which, and in which alone, the dissenting interest is strong—the class, namely, of tradesmen in the large towns. This was one of the principal grounds on which any strong objection was felt in this place to the granting of degrees by the London university. If it had been proposed to empower that, or any other establishment, to grant degrees different from those of the ancient universities, Fellows for instance, or Doctors of arts instead of Masters—Masters of civil law instead of Doctors, and which would not therefore have involved the acquisition of these privileges; though in common with the rest of the world we might have doubted the fitness of selecting that institution for peculiar privileges, we should, I imagine, have had no special objection as regarded ourselves. The same consequences which would have resulted from the Dissenters obtaining, through the London university, degrees the same as our own, would of course follow from their being admitted to degrees here, and this involves a wrong, for which it would be gross injustice not to provide a remedy.

It may be said, that it would be very easy to do this by providing, by an act of parliament, that none but members of the church of England should be eligible to those situations for which any degree in our universities is at present required as a qualification by their statutes. It is quite true that this remedy would meet this difficulty, and seems to be what justice plainly requires; but I do not remember that such a provision formed any part of the bill which passed the House of Commons last session.

But the degree of M. A. is not only a qualification for certain situations out of the university, but is also the title of admission to the governing body of the university itself; and the difficulties in the way of the admission of Dissenters arising out of this, have been perhaps as much dwelt upon as any others whatever. On the one hand, as regarded themselves, they would be in an anomalous state, and subject to constant irritation as forming part of the governing body of the university, while they were excluded from the benefits and emoluments of all those numerous foundations, of which the university almost, as it were, consists. It is much to be feared that they would constitute a band of malcontents in convocation, ever striving for innovation, and stirring up continual differences and disputes; the tendency of which would be to keep the university in a constant state of irritation and dissension, which is the last thing to be desired by any one who wishes to see it efficiently pro-

moting its proper objects. Some of the functions too of convocation are undoubtedly of such a nature, that it is little fitting that Dissenters should have a voice respecting them : for instance, there are livings in the gift of the university which are disposed of by the vote of convocation—the nomination of the preachers in the university pulpit, and of the public examiners in the schools, is also confirmed in the same way : questions also connected with the endowments of the university are submitted to convocation, and it is obvious that in a body so intimately connected with the church, many other questions must arise, which should properly be left to the judgment of the members of the church alone.

It is true that a mode might be suggested by which Dissenters might have the degree of M. A., which is all they have hitherto professed to desire, without acquiring by it the right of voting in convocation. This might be done in the following manner. After the degree of M. A. has been taken, there is a further form to be gone through at a subsequent time, before the right of voting in convocation can be exercised. This form is entitled “ *Taking out the regency.*” Now, the act of subscription to the Articles, or of making any declaration equivalent thereto, might be transferred from the time of taking the degree, to that of going through this further form. If this mode were adopted, a Dissenter, having been

admitted to the degree of M. A., would have the name, the title, the honour, the testimonial of proficiency, which is all that they have as yet professed to desire; but would not have that right of voting in convocation, to which much inconvenience at least seems to attach. He would be in the condition of a member elected to serve in parliament, but who scruples to take the oaths required before he can exercise his power as one of the legislature. Of course, if the object of a degree was the exercise of power in convocation, as that of the election of a member of parliament is that he should promote the interests of his country in the legislature, it would be absurd to propound such a plan. But the right of voting in convocation, though incidentally attached to a degree, cannot be said to be the object of it. It is a right, in fact, even now possessed only by those who, by the payment of certain fees, retain their names on the books of the university. It is a right which nine tenths of the members of convocation exercise but very rarely, and which probably one half of those who take the degree of M. A. never exercise at all. It could hardly, therefore, be made any great grievance, if in the admission of Dissenters to degrees this power were reserved. But though I thus suggest this, I do not intend to propose it as a plan I should myself advocate. I merely mention it as a means by which the specific difficulty in question might perhaps be obviated, could all other difficulties be

removed, and the question therefore be brought to this point.

I have now gone through in detail the principal points necessary to be considered in connexion with the question at issue. I have done so, I am sure, with no unfair purpose ; I trust with no prejudiced or uncandid feeling. It has been my object rather to pass the subject fully in review, and, by laying open its difficulties, to lead others to a consideration of them, than to advocate strongly any particular conclusion. I am aware that the difficulties above noticed will appear of very different magnitude to different persons, even among those who bestow upon them an equally fair and deliberate consideration. But I can hardly imagine that any person, whose mind is not strongly warped by prejudice, or inflamed by passion, can make so light of them, as to think the subject a fit one for popular declamation, party politics, and hasty and ignorant legislation.

That it has hitherto assumed this character has probably arisen from the manner in which it has been mixed up with an acknowledged grievance, for which it has been somewhat hastily assumed that the admission of Dissenters to the universities offered the most fitting, if not the only remedy : whereas, allowing that a remedy ought to be found, the proposed measure in reality supplies a very partial and insufficient one. It is obvious that I allude to the grievance of the privileges enjoyed

in the professions of law and medicine by the possessors of degrees in our universities. From the manner in which these privileges have been dwelt upon, and the hardships complained of, under which Dissenters labour for the want of them, a person unacquainted with the facts of the case would almost be led to imagine, that Dissenters were altogether excluded from the above professions, or obliged to enter upon them at such disadvantage as to throw great impediments in the way of their success. Let us see what the real state of the case is.

The only exclusive privilege is in the ecclesiastical courts, where, as the transactions relate to civil law, degrees in civil law are required as a qualification in order to practise. But the number of practitioners in this court is so extremely small, that this privilege has hardly been alluded to as a grievance in the discussions on the subject. The case, as regards the general profession of the law, is as follows :—The benchers of the inns of court, with whom rests the power of calling to the profession of the bar such persons as they deem duly qualified, entertaining the opinion that a course of general and liberal education is a good preparation for the more peculiar studies of the law, have determined to remit to persons who have attained the degree of M.A. two years of the time otherwise required in order to qualify a student to be called to the bar. Now, the degree of M.A. implies a standing of six

years in the university, and requires a residence of nearly four ; and the whole amount, therefore, of this grievance is, that a four years' residence at Oxford or Cambridge is allowed to be equivalent to two years residence at the inns of court. If one of any two persons were to go to the university, and the other were to spend at Lincoln's Inn or the Temple the time during which the first must necessarily reside in order to obtain the degree of M.A., the latter would be able to be called to the bar two years sooner than his competitor from the university, notwithstanding the advantage given to the former by his degree. Or if the latter, whom we may suppose to be a Dissenter, were to spend at one of the inns of court two only of the four years, during which the other was engaged at the university, they would start on precisely equal terms. Now, this privilege may be proper or improper ; wise or foolish ; but it cannot surely be said to amount to a very heavy grievance.

What may be the exact extent of the advantage given in the medical profession, I do not rightly know. No person who has not graduated in medicine at Oxford or Cambridge is, I believe, eligible as a fellow of the College of Physicians. And without a degree from some university he cannot practise at all ; though, from the facility with which degrees may be obtained at the Scotch universities, there is in this little especial grievance to the Dissenter.

But the whole of this system was established at

a time when medicine, as well as all other studies, was cultivated with most success at the universities. This is now no longer the case. The universities, not by any fault of theirs, but by the necessary course of events, have ceased to be great schools of medicine. The presence of the principal hospitals, of the most eminent practitioners, of the most extensive museums, all mark out the metropolis as the necessary seat of the chief schools. It is, indeed, hardly too much to say, that the universities no longer contain any school of medicine at all, and have therefore forfeited their claim to the exclusive privileges, which may once have been properly bestowed upon them. But since the real grievance is, that the universities, being bad schools of medicine, have privileges, which, if to any, ought to belong to good schools, it is a strange fancy surely to think that the admission of Dissenters to the universities would be any sufficient remedy for this evil. A Dissenter now may have frequented the first schools of medicine in England—nay in Europe. He may have studied in London and in Paris; he may have attended the most able lectures—witnessed the operations of the most skilful practitioners, and walked the largest hospitals in the world; but, for want of a degree at Oxford or Cambridge, he cannot enjoy some privileges, which a person of inferior attainments—a person who has not had equal opportunities of professional knowledge and skill, may by means of that degree possess.

The absurdity of this is glaring ; but not more glaring than that of the remedy proposed. The Dissenter complains that, having been at a good school of medicine, he cannot obtain privileges which are enjoyed by the pupils of a bad school. Would any one believe that the remedy gravely proposed for this is not to extend the privileges to the good school, but to admit the complaining party to the bad one ? It may be said, perhaps, that an attempt was made to apply a proper remedy to this evil by the demand of a charter for the London University. But though it is true that a power in the London University to grant medical degrees, would have mitigated the extent of this grievance, so far is it from being true that this is the proper remedy, that it is in principle only a further extension of the present absurdity : for the London University is one only of the many schools of medicine in the metropolis ; and, as I have been informed, one of the worst, having actually no hospital in connexion with it when the demand for the charter was made. Can absurdity go beyond this ? It is unjust to the universities to say that they have manifested any wish to retain any undue privileges of this kind. It is obvious that both law and medicine must be studied to the most advantage in the neighbourhood of the courts of law, and the great hospitals of the metropolis. The real and undoubted evil is, that the means of admission into the profession of medicine cannot be obtained at

the schools where the study of it may be most successfully pursued. The simple and sufficient remedy for the above grievance would be to form a competent tribunal in each profession for the examination and admission of members to practise in it without reference to the degrees either of the existing universities, or those of any other body.

If this were done, (and let it be remembered that this does not rest with the universities, but with other bodies, over which they have no control,) the university question would then be disembarassed from this popular topic of declamation, which, however, has little real bearing on the case ; and we might then more deliberately and impartially consider other parts of the subject.

And the first point, which I should anxiously wish to see the authorities of the university itself take into their consideration, is that of the subscription to the thirty-nine Articles, now required at matriculation. I am far from agreeing with the plausible, but most unfair representations which have been made of this practice ; nor has wit been well employed in casting ridicule upon a subject which we might expect at least to be seriously considered. The subscription required is, I believe, in this place, universally understood in the sense in which it was maintained by the Bishop of Exeter in his masterly speech in the House of Lords ; and care is taken to explain at the time of subscription

the meaning attached to compliance. But though the practice, when rightly explained, and rightly understood, is thus capable of being satisfactorily defended, I am sure that the very industrious misrepresentations which are made respecting it, create an erroneous impression upon the subject in the minds of the public at large; and that it is very commonly misunderstood even by the parties concerned. As, then, no end is answered by it, which might not be equally attained in a plainer, simpler, and more obvious mode, I should very much prefer, even with precisely the same end in view, that a declaration less liable to be misunderstood, less capable of being misrepresented, should be substituted in lieu of that subscription to the Articles which is now required. It is generally understood that a plan for this purpose lately engaged the attention of the Board of Heads of Houses, and was very near being submitted by that Board to Convocation. In common with many other persons, I much regret that that plan has not been carried into execution, and I hope that, at no distant period, it may again be brought forward with success.

But though I should consider a declaration which was precisely equivalent to subscription, a great improvement on the present practice, (and this, I believe, is all that was of late contemplated,) I should myself wish to see our doors of admission opened somewhat wider than they are at present,

by the terms of any declaration^f which might be substituted for the subscription, and our academic edifice constructed upon a more comprehensive plan. I would willingly admit to our colleges all who could conscientiously avail themselves of our institutions, such as they are : and a sincere conformity in worship, and willingness to receive instruction, is therefore the only test I should desire to see imposed ; and the necessity for such conformity, and the required attendance on such instruction, the only means of exclusion. I would not give up one jot or tittle of our system of education as now carried on. I would not sacrifice our social worship, nor any of our institutions, in order to accommodate those who may differ from us. But there are many persons who, though they might not be able to declare themselves members of our church, or to subscribe to all its Articles, might still be able very conscientiously to join in our worship, and to share in the education we offer, with no injury to us, and great advantage to themselves. All such I would gladly see received among us.

And, as I conceive that, under this system, those only, in the main, would form part of our body, who would be very fit to be members of it, I would wish to see no other limitation imposed upon our degrees than that attached to admission into our colleges. All who came professing a sincere readiness to conform to our institutions — who

passed through our course of education as well in divinity as in other subjects, and gave satisfaction in their public examination, might surely be permitted without danger to proceed to their degree, and need be subjected to no invidious distinctions among ourselves.

I consider indeed an objection to attach to the subscription to the Articles, either at matriculation, or at our degrees, quite independent of all consideration of the amount of knowledge, or exact accordance of opinion of the persons called upon to subscribe. In the first place, as subscription to the Articles is made the solemn test of the opinions of those who are admitted into holy orders, the attaching the same obligation to other less sacred circumstances, tends to lessen the serious sense in which it is viewed at ordination. But, besides this, the subscription to the Articles is an obligation, which our church in no case imposes upon its lay members. Laymen are admitted to the highest acts of church-membership—to participation in the sacraments—without being required to sign the Articles at all. Assent to the creed and the catechism is all that is necessary in order to confirmation. Confirmation is the due preparation for the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Though our church requires a declaration of full assent to all its Articles from those who are admitted to the sacred functions of the ministry, it does not seem to have intended to institute so rigid a scrutiny into

the opinions of its lay members. All it requires of them is, that they be willing to use its liturgy, and join in its communion. And it seems on this ground not reasonable to impose on laymen, as a test of fitness for our degrees, a more scrupulous and definite conformity of opinion, than our church requires in order to admission to its most sacred rites.

It would, of course, still be proper to retain the subscription to the Articles in the degrees in divinity. This is a strictly professional study, and the degrees in it would properly be open only on the same terms as the profession itself. The instruction in the faculty of theology by the professors would be according to the doctrine of the church, and the admission to the degrees in that faculty would naturally be on the same footing. But I see no reason why, under the supposed circumstances, this should be the case in the other faculties.

I know that it may be said, that in this case many persons would conceal their real sentiments, and conform to our customs, though they could not conscientiously do so, in order to share the advantages which the universities hold out. It is probable that, in some instances, such would be the case. But is it not equally probable that, in some instances, such must be the case now? for no subscriptions, nor declarations, nor oaths, can be effectual against hypocrisy: and the conscience that

could overleap the one barrier, would hardly be restrained by the other.

I do not mean that there would be no evil in the differences of opinion which, under such a system, would be contained within our walls. There is evil in all differences. There is evil in the differences which exist between equally sincere and enlightened members of our church; and undoubtedly it would be a far happier state of things, had different minds never drawn different meanings from the language of Scripture; and Scripture therefore had been capable of being left to be its own interpreter, unencumbered with creeds, and articles, and systems of faith. But this is not the case: and the question, therefore, is, not whether there would be no evil in such a system, but whether the evil would be greater than that attending our present more strictly exclusive practice. I believe that it would not. I think, on the contrary, that the feelings of many persons would be conciliated in favour of our institutions—that reasonable persons would see that we were willing to concede where concession can be safely made; and that they would give us credit for resisting those changes in our institutions to which we cannot consent, not from selfish motives, but from sincere conviction of the dangers which would attend them.

Were all grounds of complaint as regards the professions of law and medicine thus removed, and

the plausible, and in some degree well-founded, objections to our system of subscription done away—were our doors opened to those who would take advantage of our education, without wishing to interfere with the system on which it is carried on, the good sense of the educated, and well-disposed, and religious portion of the community, would surely so array itself in defence of the integrity of our institutions, as to prevent them from being wantonly tampered with by rash innovators, or sacrificed to the vain theories of a false and spurious liberality.

Other points in connexion with this subject—other changes, perhaps, which may be necessary or desirable, may occur to those who are more versed than myself in the details of our academic system. It is much to be desired that such persons would give a serious and impartial consideration to these matters. The whole subject, in all its bearings, well deserves the anxious attention of all whose sentiments have weight in the university. And, as the range of opinion in all exclusive bodies is apt to become somewhat confined, it would be well if some regard were had to the sentiments of those friends of our institutions, who, by mixing more freely with the world at large, can bring to the consideration of the subject elements of opinion, which the universities themselves do not supply. In conversing with the most sincere and intelligent

friends of our establishments out of the university, it is impossible not to see that they are in general far more disposed to some relaxation of our system, than, for the most part, we are ourselves. Nor are such sentiments confined to the lay members of our body. They are shared, I believe, by the most active and enlightened of our clerical friends—by those especially who are placed in situations to be cognizant of the feelings and opinions of society around them—to be acted upon by the advancing tide of events more early than we are within our walls: and to see the necessity for those changes, which the silent innovations of time are ever rendering necessary in all human institutions, or which the more sudden growth of new circumstances may demand. It would be well to lend a ready ear to the opinions of such persons. On a subject intimately connected, as this is, with our established church, it would be well if the sentiments of the heads of our church were obtained, and their counsels listened to with respect. And though it is a subject most unfit for popular debate and hasty legislation, it well merits the serious attention of a wise and religious government. A government of this character will weigh deliberately, decide cautiously, and not urge on rash and hasty changes. It will bear in mind how very important it is in order to the beneficial effect of any improvements, that they should be carried into

operation (as the eminent Dissenter above referred to justly remarks,) “ in accordance with the university authorities themselves ”

THE END.

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